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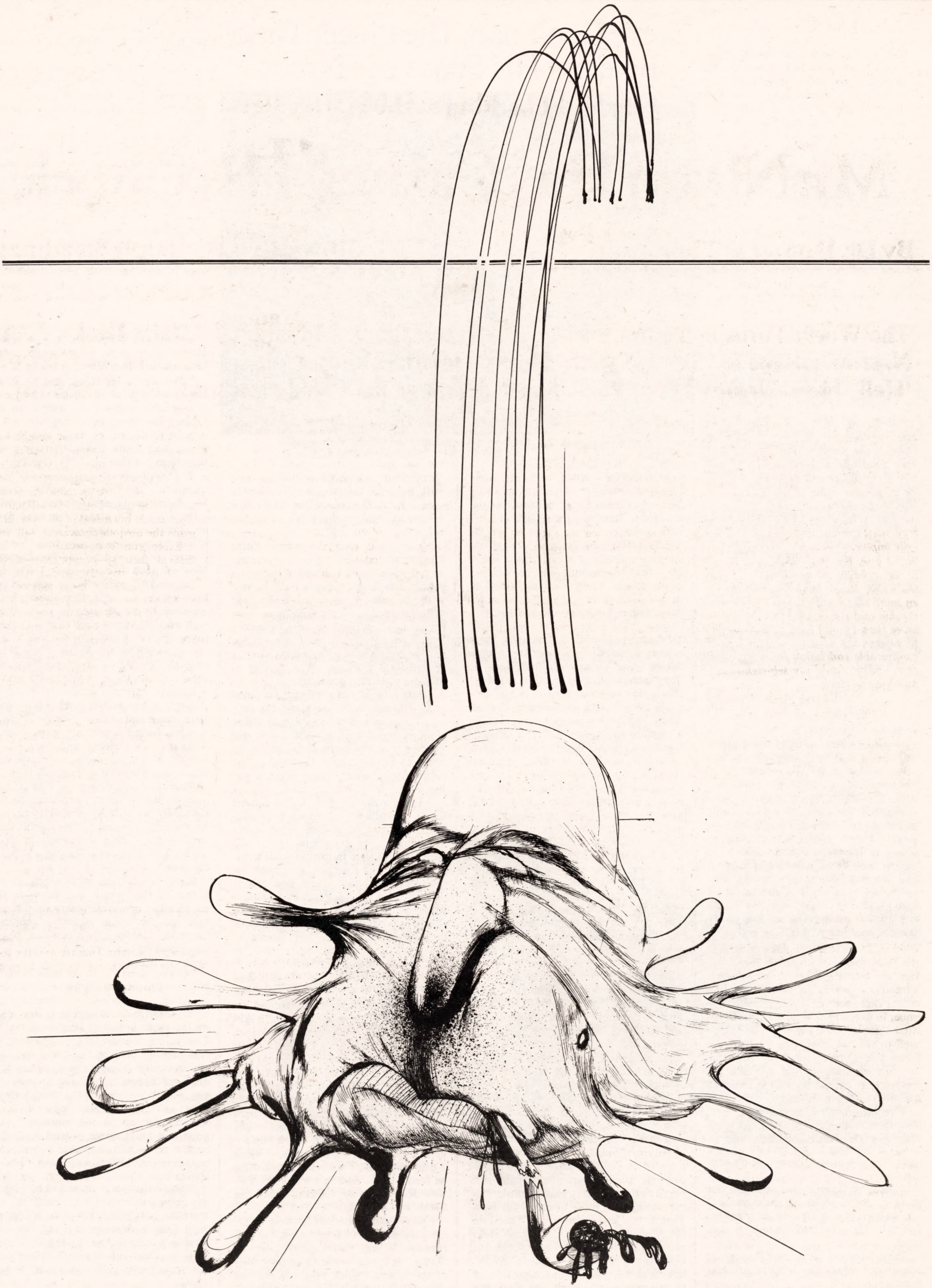
FEAR AND LOATHING AT THE WATERGATE

By Dr. Hunter S. Thompson Illustrated By Ralph Steadman



Fear and Loathing at the Watergate:

Mr. Nixon Has Cashed His Check

By Dr. Hunter S. Thompson **Illustrated By Ralph Steadman**

Part I

The Worm Turns in Swamptown . . . Violent Talk at the National Affairs Desk . . . A Narrow Escape for Tex Colson . . . Heavy Duty in The Bunker . . . No Room for Gonzo? 'Hell, They Already Have This Story Nailed Up and Bleeding from Every Extremity.'

"Reflecting on the meaning of the last presidential election, I have decided at this point in time that Mr. Nixon's landslide victory and my overwhelming defeat will probably prove to be of greater value to the nation than would the victory my supporters and I worked so hard to achieve. I think history may demonstrate that it was not only important that Mr. Nixon win and that I lose, but that the margin should be of stunning proportions. . . . The shattering Nixon landslide, and the even more shattering exposure of the corruption that surrounded him, have done more than I could have done in victory to awaken the nation. . . . This is not a comfortable conclusion for a self-confident—some would say self-righteous—politician to reach. . . . "

—George McGovern in the Washington Post: Aug. 12th, 1973

Indeed. But we want to keep in mind that "comfortable" is a very relative word around Washington these days—with the vicious tentacles of "Watergate" ready to wrap themselves around almost anybody, at any moment—and when McGovern composed those eminently reasonable words in the study of his stylish home on the woodsy edge of Washington, he had no idea how close he'd just come to being made extremely "uncomfortable."

I have just finished making out a report addressed to somebody named Charles R. Roach, a claims examiner at the Mid-Atlantic Regional Headquarters of Avis Rent-a-Car in Arlington, Virginia. It has to do with a minor accident that occurred on Connecticut Avenue, in downtown Washington, shortly after George and his wife had bade farewell to the last staggering guests at the party he'd given on a hot summer night in July commemorating the first anniversary of his seizure of the presidential nomination in Miami.

The atmosphere of the party itself had been amazingly loose and pleasant. Two hundred people had been invited, —twice that many showed up—to celebrate what history will record, with at least a few asterisks, as one of the most disastrous presidential campaigns in American history. Midway in the evening I was standing on the patio, talking to Carl Wagner and Holly Mankiewicz, when the phone began ringing and whoever answered it came back with the news that President Nixon had just been admitted to the nearby Bethesda Naval Hospital with what was officially announced as "viral pneumonia."

Nobody believed it, of course. High-powered journalists like Jack Germond and Jules Witcover immediately seized the phones to find out what was *really* wrong with Nixon . . . but the rest of us, no longer locked into deadlines or the fast-rising terrors of some tomorrow's election day, merely shrugged at the news and kept on drinking. There was nothing unusual, we felt, about Nixon caving in to some real or even psychosomatic illness. And if the truth was worse than the news . . . well . . . there would be nothing unusual about that either.

One of the smallest and noisiest contingents among the 200 invited guests was the handful of big-time journalists who'd spent most of last autumn dogging McGovern's every lame footstep along the campaign trail, while two third-string police reporters from the Washington Post were quietly putting together the biggest political story of 1972 or any other year—a story that had already exploded, by the time of McGovern's "anniversary" party, into a scandal that has even now burned a big hole for itself in every American history textbook written from 1973 till infinity.

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One of the most extraordinary aspects of the Watergate story has been the way the press has handled it: What began in the summer of 1972 as one of the great media-bungles of the century has developed, by now, into what is probably the most thoroughly and most professionally covered story in the history of American journalism.

When I boomed into Washington last month to meet Steadman and set up the National Affairs Desk once again, I expected—or in retrospect I *think* I expected—to find the high-rolling *newsmeisters* of the capital press corps jabbering blindly among themselves, once again, in some stylish sector of reality far-removed from the Main Nerve of "the story" . . . like climbing aboard Ed Muskie's *Sunshine Special* in the Florida primary and finding every media star in the nation sipping Bloody Marys and convinced they were riding the rails to Miami with "the candidate" . . . or sitting down to lunch at the Sioux Falls Holiday Inn on election day with a half-dozen of the heaviest press wizards and coming away convinced that McGovern couldn't possibly lose by more than ten points.

My experience on the campaign trail in 1972 had not filled me with a real sense of awe, vis-a-vis the wisdom of the national press corps . . . so I was seriously jolted, when I arrived in Washington, to find that the bastards had this Watergate story nailed up and bleeding from every extremity—from "Watergate" and all its twisted details, to ITT, the Vesco case, Nixon's lies about the financing for his San Clemente beach-mansion, and even the long-dormant "Agnew Scandal."

There was not a hell of a lot of room for a Gonzo journalist to operate in that high-tuned atmosphere. For the first time in memory, the Washington press corps was working very close to the peak of its awesome but normally dormant potential. The Washington Post has a half-dozen of the best reporters in America working every tangent of the Watergate story like wild-eyed junkies set adrift, with no warning, to find their next connection. The New York Times, badly blitzed on the story at first, called in hotrods from its bureaus all over the country to overcome the Post's early lead. Both Time's and Newsweek's Washington bureaus began scrambling feverishly to find new angles, new connections, new leaks and leads in this story that was unraveling so fast that *nobody* could stay on top of it. . . . And especially not the three (or four) TV networks, whose whole machinery was geared to visual/action stories, rather than skillfully planted tips from faceless lawyers who called on private phones and then refused to say anything at all in front of the cameras.

The only standard-brand visual "action" in the Watergate story had happened at the very beginning—when the burglars were caught in the act by a squad of plain-clothes cops with drawn guns—and that happened so fast that there was not even a still photographer on hand, much less a TV camera.

The network news moguls are not hungry for stories involving weeks of dreary investigation and minimum camera possibilities—particularly at a time when almost every ranking TV correspondent in the country was assigned to one aspect or another of a presidential campaign that was still boiling feverishly when the Watergate break-in occurred on June 17th. The Miami conventions and the Eagleton fiasco kept the Watergate story backstage all that summer. Both the networks and the press had their "first teams" out on the campaign trail until long after the initial indictments—Liddy, Hunt, McCord, et al.—on September 15th. And by election day in November, the Watergate story seemed like old news.

It was rarely if ever mentioned among the press people following the campaign. A burglary at the Democratic National Headquarters seemed relatively minor, compared to the action in Miami. It was a "local" (Washington) story, and the "local staff" was handling it . . . but I *had* no local staff, so I made the obvious choice.

Except on two occasions, and the first of these still haunts me. On the night of June 17th I spent most of the evening in the Watergate Hotel: From about eight o'clock until ten I was swimming laps in the indoor pool, and from 10:30 until a bit after 1:00 AM I was drinking tequila in the Watergate bar with Tom Quinn, a sports columnist for the now-defunct Washington Daily News.

Meanwhile, upstairs in room 214, Hunt and Liddy were already monitoring the break-in, by walkie-talkie, with ex-FBI agent Alfred Baldwin in his well-equipped spy-nest across Virginia Avenue in room 419 of the Howard Johnson Motor Lodge. Jim McCord had already taped the locks on two doors just underneath the bar in the Watergate garage, and it was probably just about the time that Quinn and I called for our last round of tequila that McCord and his team of Cubans moved into action—and got busted less than an hour later.

All this was happening less than 100 yards from where we were sitting in the bar, sucking limes and salt with our Sauza Gold and muttering darkly about the fate of Duane Thomas and the pigs who run the National Football League.

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Neither Bob Woodward nor Carl Bernstein from the Post were invited to McGovern's party that night—which was fitting, because the guest list was limited to those who had lived through the day-to-day nightmare of the '72 campaign. . . . People like Frank Mankiewicz, Miles Rubin, Rick Stearns, Gary Hart and even Newsweek correspondent Dick Stout, whose final dispatch on the doomed McGovern campaign very nearly got him thrown out of the *Dakota Queen II* at 30,000 feet over Lincoln, Nebraska, on the day before the election.

This was the crowd that had gathered that night in July to celebrate his last victory before the Great Disaster—the slide that began with Eagleton and ended, incredibly, with "Watergate." The events of the past six months had so

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badly jangled the nerves of the invited guests—the staffers and journalists who had been with McGovern from New Hampshire all the way to Sioux Falls on election day—that nobody really wanted to go to the party, for fear that it might be a funeral and a serious bummer.

By the end of the evening, when the two dozen bitter-enders had forced McGovern to break out his own private stock—ignoring the departure of the caterers and the dousing of the patio lights—the bulk of the conversation was focused on which one or ones of the Secret Service men assigned to protect McGovern had been reporting daily to Jeb Magruder at CREEP, and which one of the ten or 12 journalists with access to the innards of George's strategy had been on CREEP's payroll at $1500 a month. This journalist—still publicly unknown and un-denounced—was referred to in White House memos as "Chapman's Friend," a mysterious designation that puzzled the whole Washington press corps until one of the President's beleaguered ex-aides explained privately that "Chapman" is a name Nixon used, from to time, in the good old days when he was able to travel around obscure Holiday Inns under phony names. . . .

R. Chapman, Pepsi-Cola salesman, New York City . . . with a handful of friends carrying walkie-talkies and wearing white leather shoulder-holsters.

. . . But what the hell? Just send a case of Pepsi up to the suite, my man, and don't ask questions; your reward will come later—call the White House and ask for Howard Hunt or Jim McCord; they'll take care of you.

Right. Or maybe Tex Colson, who is slowly and surely emerging as the guiding light behind Nixon's whole arsenal of illegal, immoral and unethical "black advance" or "dirty tricks" department. It was Colson who once remarked that he would "walk over his grandmother for Richard Nixon" . . . and it was Colson who hired head "plumber" Egil "Bud" Krogh, who in 1969 told Daniel X. Friedman, chairman of the psychiatry department at the University of Chicago: "Anyone who opposes us, we'll destroy. As a matter of fact, anyone who doesn't support us, we'll destroy."

Colson, the only one of Nixon's top command to so far evade Watergate's legal noose, is the man who once told White House cop Jack Caulfield to put a firebomb in the offices of the staid/liberal Brookings Institute, in order to either steal or destroy some documents he considered incriminating. Colson now says he was "only joking" about the firebomb plan, but Caulfield took it so seriously that he went to then White House counsel John Dean and said he refused to work with Colson any longer, because he was "crazy."

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Crazy? Tex Colson?

Never in Hell. "He's the meanest man in American politics," says Nixon's speechwriter Pat Buchanan, smiling lazily over the edge of a beer can beside the pool outside his Watergate apartment. Buchanan is one of the few people in the Nixon administration with a sense of humor. He is so far to the right that he dismisses Tex Colson as a "Massachusetts liberal." But for some reason, Buchanan is also one of the few people—perhaps the only one—on Nixon's staff, who has friends at the other end of the political spectrum. At one point during the campaign I mentioned Buchanan at McGovern Headquarters, for some reason, and Rick Stearns, perhaps the most hardline left-bent ideologue on McGovern's staff, sort of chuckled and said, "Oh yeah, we're pretty good friends. Pat's the only one of those bastards over there with any principles." When I mentioned this to another McGovern staffer, he snapped: "Yeah, maybe so . . . like Josef Goebbels had principles."

My own relationship with Buchanan goes back to the New Hampshire primary in 1968 when Nixon was still on the dim fringes of his political comeback. We spent about eight hours one night in a Boston hotel room, finishing off a half gallon of Old Crow and arguing savagely about politics: As I recall, I kept asking him why a person who seemed to have good sense would be hanging around with Nixon. It was clear even then that Buchanan considered me stone crazy, and my dismissal of Nixon as a hopeless bum with no chance of winning anything seemed to amuse him more than anything else.

About eight months later, after one of the strangest and most brutal years in American history, Richard Nixon was President and Pat Buchanan was one of his top two speech writers along with Ray Price, the house moderate. I didn't see Pat again until the McGovern Campaign in '72 when Ron Ziegler refused to have me on the Nixon Press Plane and Buchanan intervened to get me past the White House Guard and into what turned out to be a dull and useless seat on the plane with the rest of the White House press corps. It was also Buchanan who interviewed Garry Wills, introducing him into the Nixon Campaign of 1968—an act of principle that resulted in an extremely unfriendly book called *Nixon Agonistes*.

So it seemed entirely logical, I thought—going back to Washington in the midst of this stinking Watergate summer—to call Buchanan and see if he felt like having 13 or 14 drinks on some afternoon when he wasn't at the White House working feverishly in what he calls "the bunker." Price and Buchanan write almost everything Nixon says and they are busier than usual these days, primarily figuring out what *not* to say. I spent most of one Saturday afternoon with Pat lounging around a tin umbrella table beside the Watergate pool and talking lazily about politics in general. When I called him at the White House the day before, the first thing he said was "Yeah, I just finished your book."

"Oh Jesus," I replied, thinking this naturally meant the end of any relationship we'd ever have. But he laughed. "Yeah, it's one of the funniest things I've ever read."

One of the first things I asked him that afternoon was something that had been simmering in my head for at least a year or so and that was how he could feel comfortable with strange friends like me and Rick Stearns, and particularly how he could possibly feel comfortable sitting out in the open—in plain site of the whole Watergate crowd—with a known monster whose affection for Richard Nixon was a matter of fairly brutal common knowledge—or how he felt comfortable playing poker once or twice a week sometimes with Rick Stearns, whose political views are almost as diametrically opposed to Buchanan's as mine are. He shrugged it off with a grin, opening another beer. "Oh, well, we ideologues seem to get along better than the others. I don't agree with Rick on anything at all that I can think of, but I like him and I respect his honesty."

A strange notion, the far left and far right finding some kind of odd common ground beside the Watergate pool and particularly when one of them is a top Nixon speechwriter, spending most of his time trying to keep the Boss from sinking like a stone in foul water, yet now and then laughingly referring to the White House as The Bunker.

After the sixth or seventh beer, I told him about our abortive plot several nights earlier to seize Colson out of his house and drag him down Pennsylvania Avenue tied behind a huge gold Oldsmobile Cutlass. He laughed and said something to the effect that "Colson's so tough, he might like it." And then, talking further about Colson, he said, "But you know he's not really a Conservative."

And that's what seems to separate the two GOP camps, like it separates Barry Goldwater from Richard Nixon. Very much like the difference between the Humphrey Democrats and the McGovern Democrats. The ideological wing versus the pragmatists, and by Buchanan's standards it's doubtful that he even considers Richard Nixon a Conservative.

My strange and violent reference to Colson seemed to amuse him more than anything else. "I want to be very clear on one thing," I assured him. "If you're thinking about having me busted for conspiracy on this, remember that I've already deliberately dragged you into it. He laughed again and then mentioned

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August 2nd

Patio Bar beside the Washington Hilton Swimming Pool

Steadman and his wife had just arrived from England. Sandy had flown in the day before from Colorado and I had come up from Miami after a long vacation in the decompression chamber. It was a Tuesday or Wednesday afternoon, I think, and the Watergate Hearings were in progress but we'd decided to take the first day off and get ourselves under control. One of the first things I had to do was make out a long overdue accident report for that night, two weeks earlier, when the door of my rented car smacked into the Cadillac at four in the morning. The Avis people were threatening to cut off my coverage for "non-cooperation" so I'd brought the insanely complicated accident report down to the patio table by the pool, thinking to fill it out with the help of eight or nine Carlsbergs.

Steadman was already sketching distractedly, swilling beers at a feverish rate and muttering darkly to himself about the terrible conditions in the hotel and how earlier that morning while passing thru the coffee shop, a huge ceiling lamp had fallen from the ceiling and nearly killed him.

It was "teddible teddible" he said, "the damn thing came so close that it knocked my briefcase full of drawings out of my hand. Six inches closer and it would have caved in my head!"

I nodded sympathetically, thinking it was just another one of those ugly twists of luck that always seems to afflict Ralph in this country, and I kept on grappling with the accident report.

Steadman was still babbling. "God, it's hot . . . Ah, this teddible thirst . . . what's that you've got there?"

"The goddamn accident report. I've got to make it out."

"Accident report?"

"Yeah, I had a small wreck the last time I was here about two weeks ago. . . ."

"Alright, alright. . . . Yes, two more Carlsbergs."

". . . And the car blew up the next night and I had to abandon it in Rock Creek Park at four in the morning. I think they're still billing me for it."

"Who?"

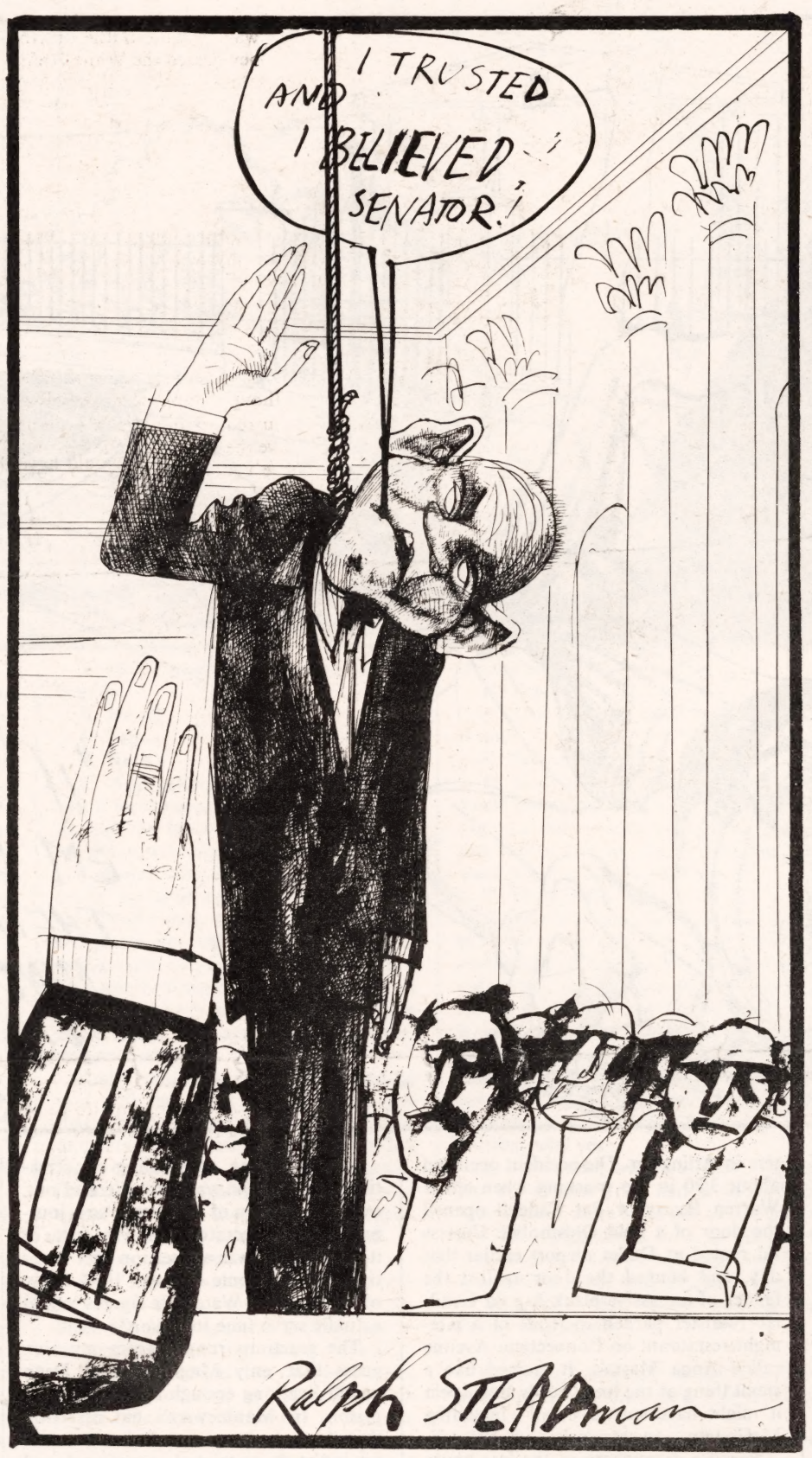
"The Avis people."

"My God, that's teddible."

"I only had it two nights. The first night I had this wreck, and the next night it blew up."

"What were you doing in this wretched city at four in the morning?"

"Well, actually we were thinking about going out to Tex Colson's house and jerking him out of bed, tying him behind the car with a big rope and dragging him down Pennsylvania Avenue . . . then cutting him loose in front of the White House Guard Gate."



"You're kidding. . . . You don't really mean that. You wouldn't do a thing like that, would you?"

"Of course not. That would be a conspiracy to commit either murder or aggravated assault, plus kidnapping . . . and you know me, Ralph; that's not my style at all."

"That's what I mean. You were drunk perhaps, eh?"

"Ah, we were drunk yes. We'd been to a party at McGovern's."

"McGovern's? Drinking? Who was with you?"

"Drinking heavily, yes. It was Warren Beatty and Pat Caddell, McGovern's poll wizard and myself and for some reason it occurred to me that the thing to do at that hour of the morning was to go out and get Colson."

"My God, that's crazy! You must have been stoned and drunk—especially by four in the morning."

"Well, we left McGovern's at about 2:30 and we were supposed to meet Crouse at this restaurant downtown. . . . McGovern lives somewhere in the Northwest part of town and it had taken me two hours to find the damn house and I figured it would take me another two hours to get out again unless I could follow somebody. Crouse was about a block ahead of me when we left. I could see his taillights but there was another car between me and Crouse and I was afraid I'd lose him in that maze of narrow little streets, almost like country lanes.

" 'We can't let Crouse get away,' I said. So I slammed it into passing gear and passed the car right in front of me in order to get behind Crouse, and all of a sudden here was a car coming the other direction on this street about 15 feet wide—just barely enough room for two cars to pass and certainly not enough room for three cars to pass, one of them going about 70 miles an hour with a drunk at the wheel.

"I thought, hmmmm, well . . . I can either slow down or stomp on it and squeeze in there, so I stomped on it and forced the oncoming car up over the curb and onto the grass in order to avoid me as I came hurtling back into my own lane, and just as I flashed past him I happened to look over and saw that it was a police car. Well, I thought, this is not the time to stop and apologize; I could see him in my rear view mirror, stopping and beginning to turn around. . . . So instead of following Crouse, I took the first left I could, turned the lights off and drove like a bastard—assuming the cop would probably chase Crouse and run him down and arrest him, but as it happened he didn't get either one of us."

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"What a rotten thing to do."

"Well, it was him or me, Ralph . . . as a matter of fact I worried about it when we didn't see Tim at the restaurant later on. But we were late because we did some high-speed driving exercises in the Southeast area of Washington—flashing along those big empty streets going into corners at 80 miles an hour and doing 180s . . . it was a sort of thunder road driving trip, screwing it on with that big Cutlass."

"Enormous car?"

"A real monster, extremely overpowered . . ."

"How big is it? The size of a bus?"

"No, normal size for a big car, but extremely powerful—much more, say, than a Mustang or something like that. We did about an hour's worth of crazed driving on these deserted streets, and it was during this time that I mentioned

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that we should probably go out and have a word with Mr. Colson—because during a conversation earlier in the evening, the consensus among the reporters at McGovern's party was that Colson was probably the only one of Nixon's first-rank henchmen who would probably not even be indicted."

"Why's that?"

"He had managed to keep himself clean, somehow—up to that point anyway. Now, he's been dragged into the ITT hassle again, so it looks like he might go down with all the others."

"But at that point, we thought, well, Colson really is the most evil of those bastards, and if he gets off there is really no justice in the world. So we thought we'd go out to his house—luckily none of us knew where he lived—and beat on his door, mumbling something like: 'God's mercy on me! My wife's been raped! My foot's been cut off!' Anything to lure him downstairs . . . and the minute he opened the door, seize him and drag him out to the car and tie him by the ankles and drag him down to the White House."

"He could identify you . . ."

"Well, he wouldn't have time to know exactly who it was—but we thought about it for a while, still driving around, and figured a beastly thing like that might be the only thing that could get Nixon off the hook, because he could go on television the next afternoon, demanding to make a nationwide emergency statement, saying: 'Look what these thugs have done to poor Mr. Colson! This is exactly what we were talking about! This is why we had to be so violent in our ways, because these thugs will stop at nothing! They dragged Mr. Colson the length of Pennsylvania Avenue at four in the morning, then cut him loose like a piece of meat!' He would call for more savage and stringent security measures against 'the kind of animals who would do a thing like this.' So we put the plot out of our heads."

"Well, it would have been a bit risky . . . wouldn't have done the Democratic party any good at all, would it?"

"Well, it might have created a bit of an image problem—and it would have given Nixon the one out he desperately needs now, a way to justify the whole Watergate trip by raving about 'this brutal act.' . . . That's an old Hell's Angels gig, dragging people down the street. Hell's Angels. Pachucos, drunken cowboys.

"But I thought more about it later, when I finally got back to the hotel after that stinking accident I'm still trying to explain . . . and it occurred to me that those bastards are really mean enough to do that to Colson, themselves—if they only had the wits to think about it. They could go out and drag him down the street in a car with old McGovern stickers on the bumpers or put on false beards and wave a wine bottle out the window as they passed the White House and cut him loose. He'd roll to a stop in front of the Guard House and the Guard would clearly see the McGovern sticker on the car screeching off around the corner and that's all Nixon would need. If we gave them the idea, they'd probably go out and get Colson tonight."

"He'd be babbling, I'd think—"

"He'd be hysterical, in very bad shape. And of course he'd claim that McGovern thugs had done it to him—if he were still able to talk. I really believe Nixon would do a thing like that if he thought it would get him out of the hole . . . So I thought about it a little more, and it occurred to me what we should do was have these masks made up—you know those rubber masks that fit over the whole head."

"Ah yes, very convincing. . . ."

"Yeah, one of them would have to be the face of Haldeman, one the face of Ehrlichman and one the face of Tony Ulasewicz."

"Yes, the meanest men on the Nixon Staff."

"Well, Colson's the meanest man in politics, according to Pat Buchanan. Ulasewicz is the hit man, a hired thug. I thought if we put these masks on and wore big overcoats or something to disguise ourselves and went out to his house and kind of shouted: 'Tex, Tex! It's me, Tony. Come on down. We've got a big problem.' And the minute he opens the door, these people with the Haldeman and Ehrlichman masks would jump out from either side and seize him by each arm—so that he sees who has him, but only for two or three seconds, before the person wearing the Ulasewicz mask slaps a huge burlap sack over his head, knots it around his knees and then the three of them carry him out to the car and lash him to the rear bumper and drag him down the street—and just as we passed the White House Guard Station, slash the rope so that Colson would come to a tumbling bloody stop right in front of the guard . . . and after two or three days in the Emergency Ward, when he was finally able to talk, after coming out of shock, he would swear that the people who got him were Haldeman, Ehrlichman and Ulasewicz—and he would *know* they were mean enough to do it, because that's the way *he* thinks. He's mean enough to do it himself. You'd have to pick a night when they were all in Washington, and Colson would swear that they did it to him, no matter what they said. He would *know* it, because he had *seen* them."

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"Brilliant, brilliant. Yes, he'd be absolutely convinced—having seen the men and the faces."

"Right. But of course you couldn't talk—just seize him and go. What would you think if you looked out and saw three people you recognized, and suddenly they jerked you up and tied you behind a car and dragged you 40 blocks? Hell, you *saw* them. You'd testify, swear under oath . . . which would cause Nixon probably to go completely crazy. He wouldn't know *what* to believe! How could he be sure that Haldeman, Ehrlichman and Ulasewicz hadn't done it? Nobody would know, not even by using lie detectors. . . . But that's a pretty heavy act to get into—dragging people around the street behind rented Avis cars, and we never quite got back to it, anyway, but if we hadn't had that accident we might have given it a little more thought although I still have no idea where Colson lives and I still don't want to know. But you have to admit it was a nice idea."

"That's a lovely thing, yes."

"You know Colson had that sign on the wall in his office saying ONCE YOU HAVE THEM BY THE BALLS, THEIR HEARTS AND MINDS WILL FOLLOW."

"Right."

"He's an ex-Marine captain. So it would be a definite dose of his own medicine."

"Do you really think he deserves that kind of treatment?"

"Well, he was going to set off a firebomb in the Brookings Institution, just to recover some papers. . . . Colson is not one of your friendlier, happier type of persons. He's an evil bastard, and dragging him down the street would certainly strike a note of terror in that crowd; they could use some humility."

"Poetic justice, no?"

"Well, it's a little rough . . . it might not be necessary to drag him 40 blocks. Maybe just four. You could put him in the trunk for the first 36 blocks, then haul him out and drag him the last four; that would certainly scare the piss out of him, bumping along the street, feeling all his skin being ripped off. . . ."

"He'd be a bloody mess. They might think he was just some drunk and let him lie there all night."

"Don't worry about that. They have a guard station in front of the White House that's open 24 hours a day. The guards would recognize Colson . . . and by that time of course his wife would have called the cops and reported that a bunch of thugs had kidnapped him."

"Wouldn't it be a little kinder if you drove about four more blocks and stopped at a phone box to ring the hospital and say, 'Would you mind going around to the front of the White House? There's a naked man lying outside in the street, bleeding to death. . . .'"

". . . and we think it's Mr. Colson."

"It would be quite a story for the newspapers, wouldn't it?"

"Yeah, I think it's safe to say we'd see some headlines on that one."

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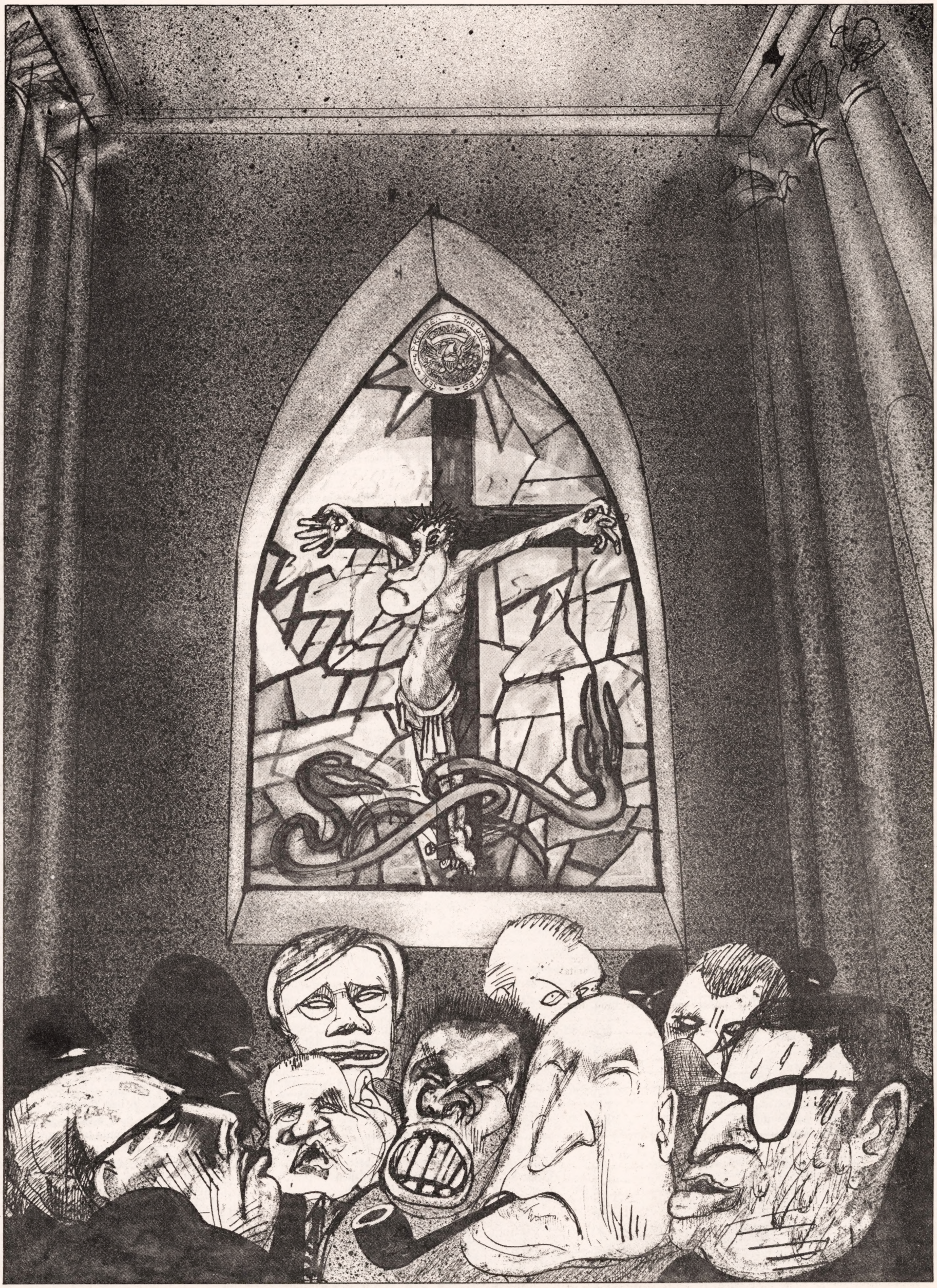

Part II

Flashbacks & Time Warps . . . Scrambled Notes and Rude Comments from the High Country . . . Dean vs. Haldeman in the Hearing Room; . . . A Question of Perjury . . . Ehrlichman Sandbags an Old Buddy . . . Are the Sharks Deserting the Suckfish?

EDITOR'S NOTE:

Due to circumstances beyond our control, the following section was lashed together at the last moment from a six-pound bundle of documents, notebooks, memos, recordings and secretly taped phone conversations with Dr. Thompson during a month of erratic behavior in Washington, New York, Colorado and Miami. His "long-range plan," he says, is to "refine" these nerve-wracking methods, somehow, and eventually "create an entirely new form of journalism." In the meantime, we have suspended his monthly retainer and canceled his credit card. During one four-day period in Washington he destroyed two cars, cracked a wall in the Washington Hilton, purchased two French Horns at $1100 each and ran through a plate-glass door in a Turkish restaurant.

Compounding the problem was the presence in Washington, for the first time, of our artist Ralph Steadman—an extremely heavy drinker with little or no regard for either protocol or normal social amenities. On Steadman's first visit to the Watergate Hearing Room he was ejected by the Capitol Police after spilling beer on a TV monitor and knocking Sam Ervin off his feet while attempting to seize a microphone to make a statement about "the rottenness of American politics." It was only the timely intervention of New York Post correspondent John Lang that kept Steadman from being permanently barred from the Hearing Room.

In any case, the bulk of what follows appears exactly as Dr. Thompson wrote it originally in his notebooks. Given the realities of our constant deadline pressure, there was no other way to get this section into print.

The Notebooks

"Jesus, this Watergate thing is unbelievable. It's terrible, like finding out your wife is running around but you don't want to hear about it."

—Remark of a fat man from Nashville sharing a taxi with Ralph Steadman.

Tuesday morning 6/26/73: 8:13 AM in the Rockies. . . .

Bright sun on the grass outside my windows behind this junk TV set and long white snowfields, still unmelted, on the peaks across the valley. Every two or three minutes the doleful screech of a half-wild peacock rattles the windows. The bastard is strutting around on the roof, shattering the morning calm with his senseless cries.

His noise is a bad burden on Sandy's nerves. "God damnit!" she mutters. "We *have* to get him a hen!"

"Fuck him; we *got* him a hen—and she ran off and got herself killed by coyotes. What the crazy bastard needs now is a bullet through the vocal cords. He's beginning to sound like Herman Talmadge."

"Talmadge?"

"Watch what's happening, goddamnit! Here's another true Son of the South. First it was Thompson . . . now Talmadge . . . and then we'll get that half-wit pimp from Florida."

"Gurney?"

I nodded, staring fixedly at the big blueish eye of the permanently malfunctioned "color TV" set that I hauled back from Washington last summer, when I finally escaped from the place . . . But now I was using it almost feverishly, day after day, to watch what was *happening* in Washington.

The Watergate Hearings—my daily fix, on TV. Thousands of people from all over the country are writing the networks to demand that this goddamn tedious nightmare be jerked off the air so they can get back to their favorite soap operas: *As the World Turns, The Edge of Night, The Price Is Right* and *What Next for Weird Betty?* They are bored by the spectacle of the Watergate hearings. The plot is confusing, they say; the characters are dull, and the dialogue is repulsive.

The President of the United States would never act that way—at least not during baseball season. Like Nixon's new White House chief of staff, Melvin Laird, said shortly before his appointment: "If the President turns out to be guilty, I don't want to hear about it."

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This is the other end of the attitude-spectrum from the comment I heard, last week, from a man in Denver: "I've been waiting a long time for this," he said. "Maybe not as long as Jerry Voorhis or Helen Gahagan Douglas . . . and I never really thought it would happen, to tell you the truth." He flashed me a humorless smile and turned back to his TV set. "But it *is,* by god! And it's almost too good to be true."

My problem—journalistically, at least—has its roots in the fact that I agree with just about everything that laughing, vengeful bastard said that day. We didn't talk much. There was no need for it. Everything Richard Milhous Nixon ever stood for was going up in smoke right in front of our eyes. And anybody who could understand and appreciate *that,* I felt, didn't need many words to communicate. At least not with me.

(The question is: what did he *stand for,* and what next for *that*? Agnew? Reagan? Rockefeller? Even Percy? Nixon was finally "successful" for the same reason he was finally brought low. He kept pushing, pushing, pushing—and inevitably he pushed too far.)

Noon—Tuesday, June 26th

The TV set is out on the porch now—a move that involved much cursing and staggering.

Weicker has the mike—*mano a mano* on Dean—and after 13 minutes of apparently aimless blathering he comes off no better than Talmadge. Weicker seemed oddly cautious—a trifle obtuse, perhaps.

What are the connections? Weicker is a personal friend of Pat Gray's. He is also the only member of the Select Committee with after-hours personal access to John Dean.

"—Live from Senate Caucus Room—"
—flash on CBS screen

Live? Rehearsed? In any case, Dean is livelier than most—not only because of what he has to say, but because he—unlike the other witnesses—refused to say it first in executive session to Committee staffers before going on TV.

Strange—Dean's obvious credibility comes not from his long-awaited impact (or lack of it) on the American public, but from his obvious ability to deal with the seven Senatorial Inquisitors. They seem awed.

Dean got his edge, early on, with a mocking lash at the integrity of Minority Counsel Fred Thompson—and the others fell meekly in line. Dean radiates a certain, very narrow kind of authority—nothing *personal,* but the kind of nasal blank-hearted authority you feel in the presence of the taxman or a very polite FBI agent.

Only Baker remains. *His* credibility took a bad beating yesterday. Dean ran straight at him, startling the TV audience with constant references to Baker's personal dealings with "the White House," prior to the hearings. There was no need to mention that Baker is the son-in-law of that late and only half-lamented "Solon" from the Great State of Illinois, Sen. Everett Dirksen.

Dean is clearly a shrewd *executive.* He will have no trouble getting a good job when he gets out of prison.

Now Montoya—the flaccid Mex-Am from New Mexico. No problem here for John Dean. . . . Suddenly Montoya hits Dean head on with Nixon's bogus quote about Dean's *investigation* clearing all members of White House staff. Dean calmly shrugs it off as a lie—"I never made any investigation."

—Montoya continues with entire list of *prior* Nixon statements.

Dean: "In totality, there are less than accurate statements in that . . . ah . . . those statements."

Montoya is *after Nixon's head!* Is this the *first sign?* Over the hump for Tricky Dick?

***Recall lingering memory of Miami Beach plainclothes cop, resting in armory behind Convention Center on night of Nixon's renomination—("You tell 'em, Tricky Dick.)—watching Nixon's speech on TV . . . with tear gas fumes all around us and demonstrators gagging outside.

4:20 EDT

As usual, the pace picks up at the end. These buggers should be forced to keep at it for 15 or 16 straight hours—heavy doses of speed, pots of coffee, Wild Turkey, etc., force them down to the raving hysterical *quick.* Wild accusations, etc. . . .

Dean becomes more confident as time goes on—a bit *flip* now, finding his feet.

Friday morning, June 29 . . . 8:33 AM

Jesus, this waterhead Gurney again! You'd think the poor bugger would have the sense to not talk anymore . . . but no, Gurney is still blundering along, still hammering blindly at the receding edges of Dean's "credibility" in his now-obvious role as what Frank Reynolds and Sam Donaldson on ABC-TV both described as "the waterboy for the White House."

Gurney appears to be deaf; he has a brain like a cow's udder. He asks his questions—off the typed list apparently furnished him by Minority (GOP) counsel, Fred J. Thompson—then his mind seems to wander, his eyes roam lazily around the room while Thompson whispers industriously in his ear, his hands shuffle papers distractedly on the table in front of his microphone . . . and meanwhile, Dean meticulously chews up his questions and hands them back to him in shreds; so publicly mangled that their fate might badly embarrass a man with good sense. . . .

But Gurney seems not to notice: His only job on this committee is to *Defend the Presidency,* according to his instructions from the White House—or at least whatever third-string hangers-on might still be working there—and what we tend to forget, here, is that it's totally impossible to understand Gurney's real motives without remembering that he's the Republican Senator from

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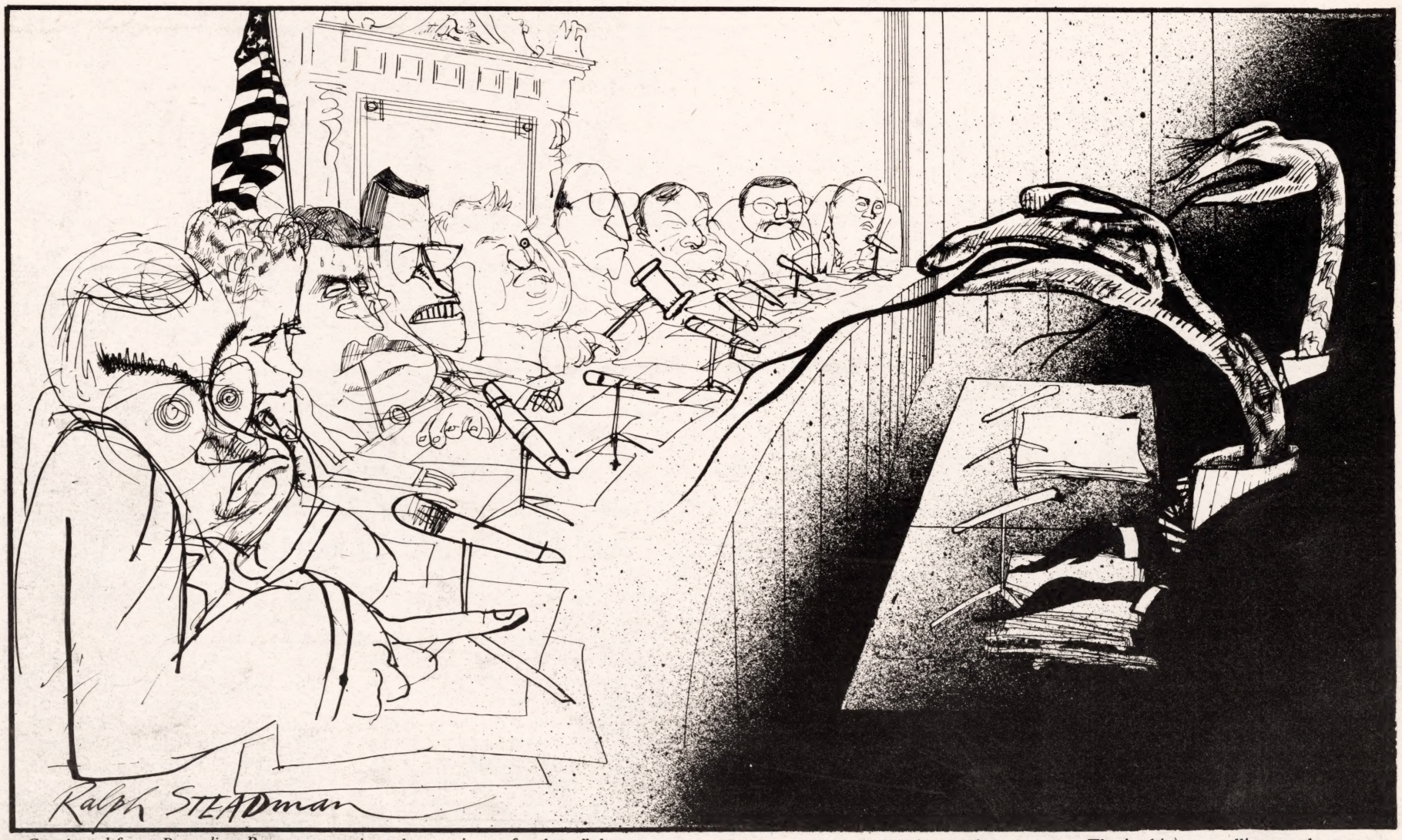

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Florida, a state where George Wallace swept the *Democratic primary* in 1972 with 78% of the vote, and which went 72% for Nixon in November.

In a state where even Hubert Humphrey is considered a dangerous radical, Ed Gurney's decision to make an ignorant yahoo of himself on national TV makes excellent sense—at least to his own constituency. They are watching TV down in Florida today, along with the rest of the country, and we want to remember that if Gurney appears in Detroit and Sacramento as a hideous caricature of the imbecilic Senator Cornpone—that's not necessarily the way he appears to the voters around Tallahassee and St. Petersburg.

Florida is not Miami—contrary to the prevailing national image—and one of the enduring mysteries in American politics is how a humane & relatively enlightened politican like Reuben Askew could have been elected Governor of one of the few states in the country where George Wallace would have easily beaten Richard Nixon—in a head-to-head presidential race—in either 1968 or 1972. Or even 1976, for that matter. . . .

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And so much for all that. Gurney is off the air now—having got himself tangled up in a legal/constitutional argument with Sam Ervin and Dean's attorney. He finally just hunkered down and passed the mike to Senator Inouye, who immediately re-focused the questioning by prodding Dean's memory on the subject of White House efforts to seek vengeance on their "enemies."

Which Senators—in addition to Teddy Kennedy—were subjects of surveillance by Nixon's gumshoes? Which journalists—in addition to the man from Newsday who wrote unfavorable things about Bebe Rebozo—were put on The List to have their tax returns audited? Which athletes and actors—in addition to Joe Namath and Paul Newman—were put on the list to be "screwed"?

Dean's answers were vague on these things. He's not interested in "interpreting the motives of others," he says—which is an easy thing to forget, after watching him on the tube for three days, repeatedly incriminating at least half the ranking fixers in Nixon's inner circle: Colson, Haldeman, Ehrlichman, Mitchell, Magruder, Strachan, Ziegler, Moore, LaRue, Kalmbach, Nofziger, Krogh, Liddy, Kleindienst . . . and the evidence is "mind-boggling," in Senator Baker's words, when it comes in the form of verbatim memos and taped phone conversations.

The simple-minded vengefulness of the language seems at least as disturbing as the vengeful plots un-veiled.

5:35 EDT

Sitting out here on the porch, naked in a rocking chair in the half-shade of a dwarf juniper tree—looking out at snow-covered mountains from this hot lizard's perch in the sun with no clouds at 8000 feet—a mile and a half high, as it were—it is hard to grasp that this dim blue tube sitting on an old bullet-pocked tree stump is bringing me every un-censored detail—for five or six hours each day from a musty brown room 2000 miles east—of a story that is beginning to look like it can have only one incredible ending—the downfall of the President of the United States.

Six months ago, Richard Nixon was the most powerful political leader in the history of the world, more powerful than Augustus Caesar when he had his act rolling full bore—six months ago.

Now, with the passing of each sweaty afternoon, into what history will call "the Summer of '73," Richard Nixon is being dragged closer and closer—with all deliberate speed, as it were—to disgrace and merciless infamy. His place in history is already fixed: He will go down with Grant and Harding as one of democracy's classic mutations.

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9:22 PM

Billy Graham Crusade on both TV channels. . . . But what? What's happening here? An acid flashback? A time warp? CBS has Graham in Orange County, raving about "redemption through *blood*." Yes, God demands *Blood!* . . . but ABC is running the Graham Crusade in South Africa, a huge all-white Afrikaner pep rally at Johannesburg's Wanderers Stadium. (Did I finally get that right; are these mushrooms deceiving me?)

Strange . . . on this eve of Nixon's demise, his private preacher is raving about *blood* in Los Angeles (invoking the actual bloody images of Robert Kennedy's brain on the cold concrete floor of the Ambassador Hotel kitchen and Jack Kennedy's blood "on his widow's dress that tragic day in Dallas" . . . and the blood of Martin Luther King on that motel balcony in Memphis).

But *wait*? Is that a *black* face I see in the crowd at Wanderers Stadium. Yes, a rapt black face, wearing aviator shades and a green army uniform . . . stoned on Billy's message, along with all the others: "Your *soul* is searching for God! [pause, body crouched, both fists shaking defiantly in the air. . . .] They tore his flesh! They pulled his *beard* out." Graham is in a wild Charleton Heston fighting stance now: "And while they were doing that, 72 million avenging angels had to be held back . . . yes . . . by the bloody arm of the Lord . . . from sweeping this planet into *hell*."

Cazart! Seventy-two million of the fuckers, eh? That threat would never make the nut in L.A. It would have to be 72 *billion* there. But South Africa is the last of the white nazi bush-leagues, and when you mention 72 million of *anything* ready to sweep across the planet, they *know* what you mean in South Africa.

Niggers. The avenging black horde . . . and suddenly it occurs to me that Graham's act is extremely subtle; he is actually *threatening* this weeping crowd of white-supremist burghers. . . . Indeed. . . . Redemption Thru Fear! It knocked 'em dead in Houston, so why not here?

10:05

The news, and John Dean again—that fiendish little drone (Did the president seem *surprised* when you gave him this information?) "No sir, he did not."

The junkies are rolling up the tents at Camp David tonight. Mister Nixon has cashed his check. Press reports from "the Western White House" in San Clemente say the President has "no comment" on Dean's almost unbelievably destructive testimony.

No comment. The boss is under sedation. Who is with him out there on that lonely western edge of America tonight. Bebe Rebozo? Robert Abplanalp, W. Clement Stone?

Probably not. They must have seen what Nixon saw today—that the Ervin committee was going to give Dean a *free ride*. His victims will get their shots at him tomorrow—or next week—but it won't make much difference, because the only ones left to question him are the ones he publicly ridiculed yesterday as tools of the White House. Baker's credibility is so crippled—in the wake of Dean's references in his opening statement to Baker's alleged "willingness to cooperate" with the Nixon brain-trust in the days before these hearings—that anything Baker hits Dean with tomorrow will seem like the angry retaliation of a much-insulted man.

And what can poor Gurney say? Dean contemptuously dismissed him—in front of a nationwide TV audience of 70 million cynics—as such a hopeless yo-yo that he wouldn't even have to be leaned on. Gurney was the only one of the seven senators on the Ervin committee that Nixon's strategists figured was safely in their pocket, before the hearings started. Weicker, the maverick Republican, was considered a lost cause from the start.

"We knew we were in trouble when we looked at that line-up," Dean testified. There was something almost like a smile on his face when he uttered those words . . . the rueful smile of a good loser, perhaps? Or maybe something else. The crazy, half-controlled flicker of a laugh on the face of a man who is just beginning to think he might *survive* this incredible trip. By 4:45 on Tuesday, Dean had the dazed, still hyper-tense look of a man who knows he

were not taken seriously at first, but in the end they contributed just as surely to Mitchell's downfall as Jim McCord's letter to Judge Sirica.

His wife and his bugger: McCord's letter from jail about "higher-ups" involved in the Watergate affair was not much different from Martha's ranting about "dirty business" in the White House . . . and, taken together, they lent the weight of headlines to a supposedly secret grand jury investigation that was already turning up more bombshell evidence than Nixon's Justice Dept. wanted to handle.

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Mitchell had already resigned at this point, claiming marital difficulties with Martha. But his resignation came almost immediately after the Watergate burglars were arrested—shortly after he'd officially given up his AG's job to become Nixon's campaign manager once again—and he must have known at the time that he had drifted into big trouble. Haldeman and Ehrlichman had already moved between him and his one-time protege, The President, and whatever happened next was beyond his control.

Which gets back to his "defense," based on Executive Loyalty, in front of the Ervin committee—which was no real defense at all, because Mitchell realized, at that point, that he *had* no defense. And he also must have realized that his name was on the low side of the line that Haldeman, Ehrlichman and Nixon, along with defense attorney John Wilson, had already drawn between those who were "necessary to the defense of the presidency," and those who weren't.

Mitchell wasn't. He was headed for

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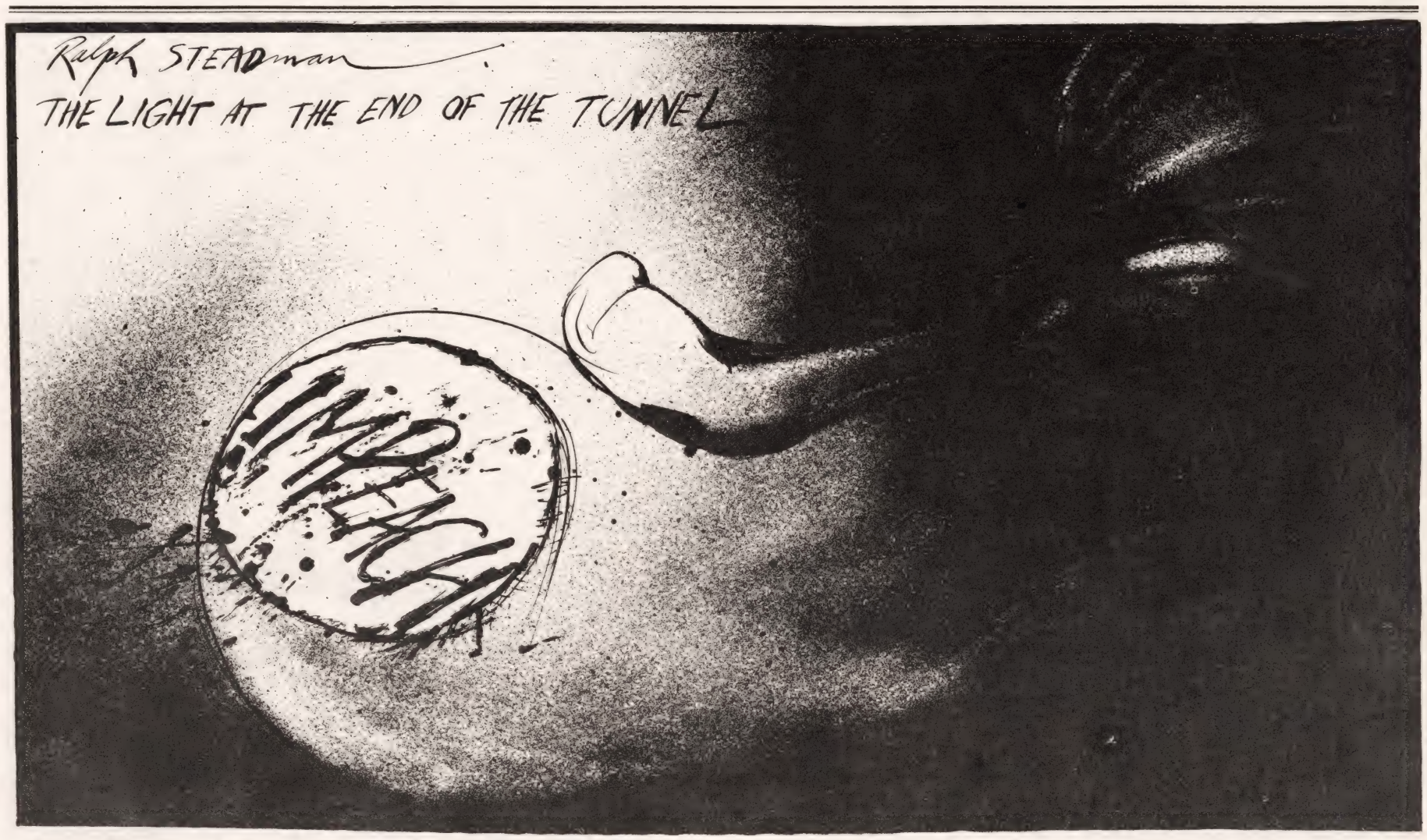

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jail. Or, failing that, he would spend the rest of his life testifying in various courtrooms. (Looking back on the infamous "Teapot Dome" scandal under President Harding's administration in the early Twenties, it is worth remembering that the main figure—Interior Secretary Albert Fall—fought his case through the courts for ten years before he finally went to prison in 1931.)

John Mitchell is 59 years old. His reputation is shattered, his career is finished, his wife has publicly shunned him—and his only hope now is Executive Clemency, which depends entirely on Nixon's survival in office. If "The Boss" can hang on for three more years, he'll be in a position to keep whatever commitments he's made to those who Kept the Faith—Pardons, Clemency, Writs of Absolution or whatever; if Nixon survives this crisis he will owe a lot of favors.

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The axis of Nixon's new and perhaps final strategy began to surface with the first mention of "the tapes," and it has developed with the inevitability of either desperation or inspired strategy ever since. The key question is whether the "constitutional crisis" Nixon seems determined to bring down on himself by forcing the Tape Issue all the way to the Supreme Court is a crisis that was genuinely forced on him, by accident—or whether it is a masterpiece of legal cynicism that bubbled up at some midnight hour many weeks ago from the depths of attorney John Wilson's legendary legal mind.

The conventional press wisdom—backed up by what would normally be considered "good evidence" or at least reliable leaks from the Ervin committee—holds that the existence of the Presidential Tapes & the fact that Nixon has been systematically bugging every conversation he's ever had with anybody, in any of his offices, ever since he got elected, was a secret that was only unearthed by luck, shrewdness and high-powered sleuth-work. According to unofficial but consistently reliable sources, Alex Butterfield—current head of the Federal Aviation Administration and former "chief for internal security" at the White House—was privately interviewed "more or less on a hunch" by Ervin committee investigators, and during the course of this interview talked himself into such an untenable position while trying to explain the verbatim-accuracy of some Oval Office logs that he finally caved in and spilled the whole story about Nixon's taping apparatus.

According to one of the investigators who conducted the private interview—in the ground-floor bowels of the Ervin committee's "boiler room" in the Old Senate Office Building—Butterfield couldn't explain why the logs of Nixon's conversations in his own office were so precise that they included pauses, digressions, half-sentences and even personal speech-patterns.

"When I finally asked him if maybe these logs had been transcribed from tapes," said the investigator, "he sort of slumped back in his chair and said, 'I wish you hadn't asked me that.' And then he told us the whole thing."

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I was sitting in the hearing room about 24 hours later when word began buzzing around the press tables, just before lunch, that the next person to face the committee would be an unscheduled "mystery witness"—instead of Nixon's personal attorney, Herbert Kalmbach, who was officially scheduled to appear when Ervin and his cohorts came back from lunch. I walked across the street to the air-conditioned bar in the Capitol Hill Hotel and heard some of the press people speculating about a man named Alex Butterfield who was going to tell the committee that Nixon had made tape recordings of all the disputed conversations referred to in John Dean's testimony.

"Well, that should just about wrap it up," somebody said.

"Bullshit," said another voice. "He'll burn those tapes before he gives them to Ervin."

"Why?"

"Shit, if he thought they'd be any good to him, the committee would have had them a long time ago. Buzhardt would have turned them over personally to Sam Dash five minutes after Dean finished reading his opening statement."

The conversation rambled on, punctuated by the arrival of beer and sandwiches. The only other comment that sticks in my head from that lunch break before Butterfield came on was a rumor that the "mystery witness" had been "dug up" by staffers on the *Republican* side of the Ervin committee. It hardly seemed worth wondering about, at the time . . . but that was before either Butterfield or Haldeman had testified about the tapes, and also before Nixon's carefully considered announcement that he couldn't release the tapes to anybody—despite subpoenas from both the Ervin committee and the Special Prosecutor—for fear of undermining the whole foundation of American government.

The President has made it absolutely clear that he has no intention of releasing those tapes—not even to an elite panel of judges who would hear them in

The One-Legged Ace

strict privacy to determine their relevance—unless the US Supreme Court compels him to do so, with a "definitive order."

Nobody seems to know what he means by "definitive," and there is no precedent in US history for the Supreme Court "compelling" a President to do anything. But Richard Nixon is not acting with presidential style and elan these days; his recent behavior is more reminiscent of ex-Mafia boss Lucky Luciano during his long legal fight with US Immigration authorities who eventually succeeded in having him deported to Italy.

This may be the key to Nixon's defiant and strangely obtuse stance with regard to the tapes. His decision to hang onto them was not universally admired for its wisdom—not even by Henry Kissinger, General Haig, Ron Ziegler and Melvin Laird. The names of these four, along with at least three other ranking White House advisers, were aggressively leaked on the Washington press/cocktail circuit as the ones who tried to convince Nixon to release the tapes—if only because of the fearful, long-term implications of his disastrous slump in the public opinion polls. If the Nixon-McGovern election were held today, the consensus among pollsters is that McGovern would win by anywhere from one to five points—a fantastic jump from his 23 point loss last November.

The polls, however, are not the worst of Nixon's problem. At least not yet. Garry Wills, an editor of the arch-conservative National Review, has come up with a deeper and dirtier angle—the idea that Nixon has dug his own grave by forcing the Supreme Court to rule "definitively" on the Tapes Issue: Because, as Wills sees it, Nixon will be mired in deep shit whether the court rules for *or* against him.

Wills's argument assumes—contrary to the wisdom of most press wizards—that the tapes will confirm Nixon's *guilt:* So it will be all over for him, if and when he finally yields them up. This line of thinking is bolstered by John Dean's apparent eagerness to make the tapes public . . . or, in the words of CBS's Dan Rather: "Dean says, 'Let the tapes roll.'"

The kicker in Wills's argument, however, is based on the possibility that the Supreme Court will uphold Nixon's executive privilege (or presidential privacy) argument, and allow him to keep the tapes to himself. At this point, says Wills, Nixon will have *won* his Separation of Powers argument and established the principle he claims to be defending—which will neutralize his *legal* reasons for refusing to release the tapes either to Ervin's committee or Cox's grand jury.

In other words, if the Supreme Court rules *for* him, Nixon will be left with only one reason for hanging onto the tapes—self-preservation. If he prevails in the "constitutional crisis," if his lawyers pursuade the nine-man Court—including the four new Justices who owe their jobs to Nixon—that the president has a constitutional right to keep his private seal on conversations taped secretly in his White House office, then he's going to have a hell of a hard time explaining to Congress and the public why he still refuses to let anybody except Harry "Bob" Haldeman listen to the goddamn things.

On the day after US District Court Judge John Sirica ruled *against* Nixon's argument for holding onto the tapes, CBS correspondent Fred Graham observed on the *Morning News* that, "President Nixon seems to have very strong reasons for not ever letting these tapes see the light of day."

Indeed. Judge Sirica's ruling was only the first leg of the trip that will eventually force the Supreme Court to deal with the question of a "definitive order" with regard to "the tapes." Nixon immediately appealed Sirica's ruling, which gives his lawyers time to prepare a new argument for the Appeals Court—and if they lose that one, too, they'll have another breathing spell to revise and polish their case for a final decision by the US Supreme Court. There is no way this could happen before early October, and that gives Nixon the time he desperately needs for a campaign to turn public opinion around on the Watergate issue.

His 11th-hour strategy—according to those simultaneous leaks to Evans & Novak and both Alsop brothers—is to take the offensive at full gallop while the Watergate hearings are still in recess, and somehow convince public opinion that the whole thing is some kind of nefarious plot to "get" him.

Which is true, in a sense—but only because a lot of people who've been asleep for a long time, like Senators Sam Ervin and Lowell Weicker, suddenly woke up to the fact that a gang of crude salesmen using a Los Angeles ad agency for a power base came very, very close to seizing long-term control of the entire United States government. That list of "White House enemies" is a national joke now—but the fascist thinking behind it was no joke to all the people who had their phones tapped, their mail opened and their tax returns pulled out of the pile for "special auditing." Nixon himself—along with John Dean and Tom Charles Huston—is on record (not denied by any of the three) as a strong advocate of the idea that the White House should keep a constantly updated list of "people who are giving us trouble," so they could all be properly "screwed" just as soon as this nasty little Watergate problem simmers down and things get back to normal.

But things are never going to "get back to normal" for Richard Nixon—particularly when the Supreme Court rules either for or against him, and he still refuses to give up the tapes. At that point, public opinion polls on the question of Impeachment will start getting nasty. Given the make-up and collective personality of the US Supreme Court, it is no more likely to issue a "definitive order" than they are to rule blatantly in Nixon's favor on the tape question. No less a Nixon spokesman than Pat Buchanan has argued, on national TV, that a President's right to safeguard his private (and even taped) conversations is on the same level as a journalist's right to refuse to testify

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EDITOR'S NOTE:

Dr. Thompson was unreasonably delayed by unforseen circumstances on the freeway to Andrews Air Force Base, and thus missed the flight to San Clemente to catch Nixon's press conference. We have no reason to feel that the White House Press Office has anything against our correspondent, certainly not since Nixon himself has gotten heavily into large doses of mental alertness drugs these last few weeks. Nonetheless, being on the somewhat cautious side, we had another man at the press conference just in case.

This is the report, from our cub, William Elin:

Richard M. Nixon, ace track star for Whittier College, held his first press conference today since gangrene had forced doctors to amputate his leg, some five weeks ago. Expectedly, the first question to Mr. Nixon was would the loss of a leg in any way impair him from breaking the three-minute mile as he had claimed he would four years ago.

"Uh, in answer to your question, let me say this. Many members of the American people, as well as the press, and foreign officials from the Olympics, have as you well know, been concerned that the loss of my leg will impede me from breaking the three-minute mile, and I am glad to finally answer that question and I say to you now, all of you reporters here and all of the people watching on television or listening on the radio, that it will not. When I joined the track team, I joined to accomplish *one* thing, to break the record for the three-minute mile. I accepted that mandate; I accept it now.

"Sure, it's tough, the fact that I have only one leg has made it tough on us all. Believe me [chuckles here], no one knows better than me just how hard it has been. But I think the important thing to remember is, that I was elected to this team to do a job, and this constant obsession that the press, many members of the public, has with this missing leg business has *prevented* me, to great extent, from pushing forward with great vigor with my vigorous training schedule. Let us not get, uh . . . hung up, with the questions do I have a leg, do I not have a leg, the important thing is I was elected to a position to do a job, to break the world's record for the three-minute mile, and I intend to finish that job, no matter how long it takes. You must not forget here, this is a great project we've ventured on, we're about to enter an era where no American before has ever thought of breaking the three-minute mile. Why, the ramifications of this act will have repercussions for years, for your children, for your children's children. I think it's time we all moved forward, put the fact of the amputation aside, and let me get back to the job I was hired to do."

"BUT YOU'VE ONLY GOT ONE LEG!" screamed Dan Rather of CBS.

"I know that Mr. Chancellor. I know that. But let me say this to you. I have already instructed the Surgeon General, and he is already pressing ahead with the investigation, to investigate whether it would be possible for me to get a *new* leg, a *better* leg, a leg which would not be susceptible to the infections and gangrene of the past, and he has already informed me, although he is checking to confirm this with major doctors in hospitals and private practice *all over the world,* that this is possible, this may well be possible. And I want to assure everyone listening here and at home on television tonight, of this one thing. [pause] That this *new* leg, I will get, this *new* leg which will be fitted onto the right side of my crotch, will be *better,* and more *stable,* and less likely to become infected, than my old leg *ever was* in the past.

Q. Mr. Nixon, what do you think your chances are in the 50-yard dash tomorrow, considering all your opponents will be running on two legs?

"I would like to make a comment about something, sir, before I answer that question. We've been standing here, and I've been leaning, for 30 minutes, and I have yet to hear a question about anything other than my missing leg. And this is the disproportionate interest in my missing leg I've been talking about. I've heard not one question on what do I think the track will be like tomorrow, whether it will be a fast track or a wet track, whether it plans to rain, the crowd attendance, Jimmy the Greek's odds, all *important essential* matters that will concern each and every one of you right here, and all of the American public listening at home. These are vital matters, important to the sanctity and future of the College and the history of track meets, and yet, they are being neglected.

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about his talks with alleged felons . . . but what Buchanan failed to mention was that The Court recently ruled *against* journalists on that question: The majority opinion, by Justice Byron White, quoted an old legal principle to the effect that "the court has a right to *any* man's evidence." Which would seem to include Presidents potentially involved in a criminal conspiracy, as well as journalists who get personally involved with criminals in the course of their work.

Looking back on its own decisions—denying special privilege to the press (Caldwell) or executive privilege to a Senator (Gravel), the Court will have to bend over backwards to give Nixon room to maneuver with the tapes. Nobody with good sense would put money on the chance of a "definitive order." That is not The Court's style, these days.

So the odds are better than even that Nixon's lawyers will contrive to give The Court an opening to make a very narrow ruling—nothing even approaching a "definitive order"—and that Nixon will use that decision to bury the tapes even deeper in his private vault. Cox and Ervin will immediately call press conferences to denounce the President's "arrogant and irresponsible behavior"—but Nixon will hang tough and exhaust all his options.

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First he will fly to Steubenville, Ohio, for a ticker-tape parade down Main Street—gallantly defying a well-publicized "assassination plot"—to make a nationally televised fire & brimstone speech to a cheering, overflow crowd of 350 or so at Steubenville's American Legion Post No. 007. . . . And when that bombs, he'll turn up in the Emergency Ward of the Bethesda Naval Hospital with an acute case of Balderson's Tremor, requiring a long and extremely private rest . . . and finally, if the tide of public opinion is still running against him when he struts out of the hospital, he will go back to the White House and arrange for a prime-time TV speech to announce that "Three minutes ago, on orders from Dr. Kissinger and myself, US Air Force B-52s commenced saturation bombing of Libya and Egypt, in order to disintegrate a communist plot to deprive US citizens of heating fuel for their homes in the depths of this brutal winter."

Given a choice between launching a half-mad war in the mid-East and resigning for the good of the nation, Richard Nixon will opt for the half-mad war. If nothing else, it would force the press to concentrate on something other than the Watergate/Agnew/ITT/San Clemente scandals . . . and it would also take the public mind off those goddamn silly tapes.

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Which gets us back to "the line," and the real reason for—as Fred Graham said—"President Nixon's very strong reasons for not ever letting those tapes see the light of day." It also gets back to why Alex Butterfield mentioned the existence of the tapes in the first place ("I wish you hadn't asked that . . .") and why Haldeman stunned the Ervin committee, during his TV appearance, with the casual announcement that he had taken the sacred tapes home, six weeks after he resigned his post at the White House, and kept them there for a period of some 48 hours.

Ervin and his cohorts were deranged by this admission. They'd been working 25 hours a day for more than a week to get hold of the tapes, themselves, but Nixon had turned them down cold . . . and now here was a key witness and potential defendant in trials with heavy bearing on the question of Presidential Impeachment telling them—and a nationwide TV audience of 30 or 40 million—that Nixon let him take the tapes to his own house so he could "review" them on his own machinery for at least two days.

I was sitting just behind John Wilson, Haldeman's (and Ehrlichman's) defense attorney when Harry/Bob launched his bombshell, and I noticed that Wilson kept a straight face. The committee, of course, was in chaos. For the first time since Butterfield's initial mention of the tapes, they seemed to understand that things were not quite what they appeared to be. Somebody was being sandbagged, and the look on Sam Ervin's face was noticeably different from his expression during all those high, lyrical moments when he was quoting the Bible and the constitution.

Both Ervin and Sam Dash had just been zapped on a fine point of criminal law—a point that even Archibald Cox now defends. The first tip-off had come several days earlier, after Nixon's first public announcement that he would *not* release the tapes, when one of John Dean's attorneys, Robert McCandless, sauntered into a downtown Washington bar frequented by pols and press people, and called for a scotch on the rocks before saying in a loud enough voice that his client was "off the hook," because there was no way anybody legally linked to "those tapes" could ever be convicted if Nixon refused to release them.

It was a clear case of the Government withholding evidence crucial to the defense, he said, and in virtually every other case where that had happened, the Government had chosen to drop charges rather than make its evidence public . . . which meant that John Dean, riding a wave of strange circumstance that must have driven Nixon up the wall when John Wilson told him about it, would necessarily join Haldeman, Ehrlichman and Nixon on the small list of legally untouchables—as long as Nixon holds onto the tapes.

This is *the line*—the only one Nixon and his ranking Gauleiters have ever recognized—and the betting in legal circles is that it will probably hold. There is no judicial precedent in American history for *compelling* a President to obey a court order—not even from the highest court in the land. If Nixon hangs tough on the tapes, ignoring all subpoenas and court orders on the chance that the House of Representatives doesn't have the balls to impeach him, the only other alternative is an ancient and untested law that would theoretically enable Congress to place him "under arrest" and "jail" him in the basement of the US Capitol.

I have tried to discuss this with several Senators and Congressmen, but their faces tend to go blank just as soon as they sense what I'm getting at. The idea of locking Nixon in a closet underneath the Capitol has not caught on yet, in Washington.

The "sense of the Congress," for good or ill, still seems to be that Nixon won't force the issue quite that far—if only because of the guaranteed drastic effect it would have on his standing in the public opinion polls. He is already looking at between 25 and 30% of the voting populace who think he should be impeached—and even the *appearance* of telling both the Senate and the Supreme Court to fuck off would be likely to drive that figure up toward the magic 50% mark that even a liberal boomer like Congressman Les Aspin (D-Wisc.) says would be necessary to get the House moving seriously on Impeachment proceedings.

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Defying both the courts and the polls is a long risk for any President to take—and especially long for one who has never been personally popular, anyway. But Nixon seems ready to risk it. He has already defied Judge Sirica, and his programmed leaks to the press leave no doubt in anyone's mind that he's gearing up for a serious counter-attack. He has decided, apparently, to move decisively on two fronts at the same time: A holding action in the courts, retreating as slowly as possible from one appeal to the next—and using whatever time he can gain by legal maneuvering to whip up a massive public relations effort to revive his crumbling image.

The obvious question is *why* would he take such a risk? And the answer is almost as obvious: The tapes, if they haven't been altered, will incriminate both Haldeman and Ehrlichman, along with Nixon and perhaps several others. Nixon has already said that the tapes are subject to "misinterpretation," and the line between that and "obstruction of justice" is dangerously thin—especially if the decision is up to a Grand Jury selected from "typical citizens," in the District of Columbia, which is definitely not "Nixon country." In the 1972 election The District and Massachusetts were the only two "states" that went for McGovern. Outside of Cambridge, Berkeley and Aspen, Washington, D.C. is probably the last place in America that Nixon would choose—if he had a choice—to turn tapes admittedly subject to "misinterpretation" over to a Grand Jury. It would be like sending George McGovern out to defend his position on Amnesty before a Grand Jury in Orange County, California.

That is Nixon's *obvious* problem with the tapes: He doesn't dare give them up because he's afraid—or even *knows*—that they'll incriminate him.

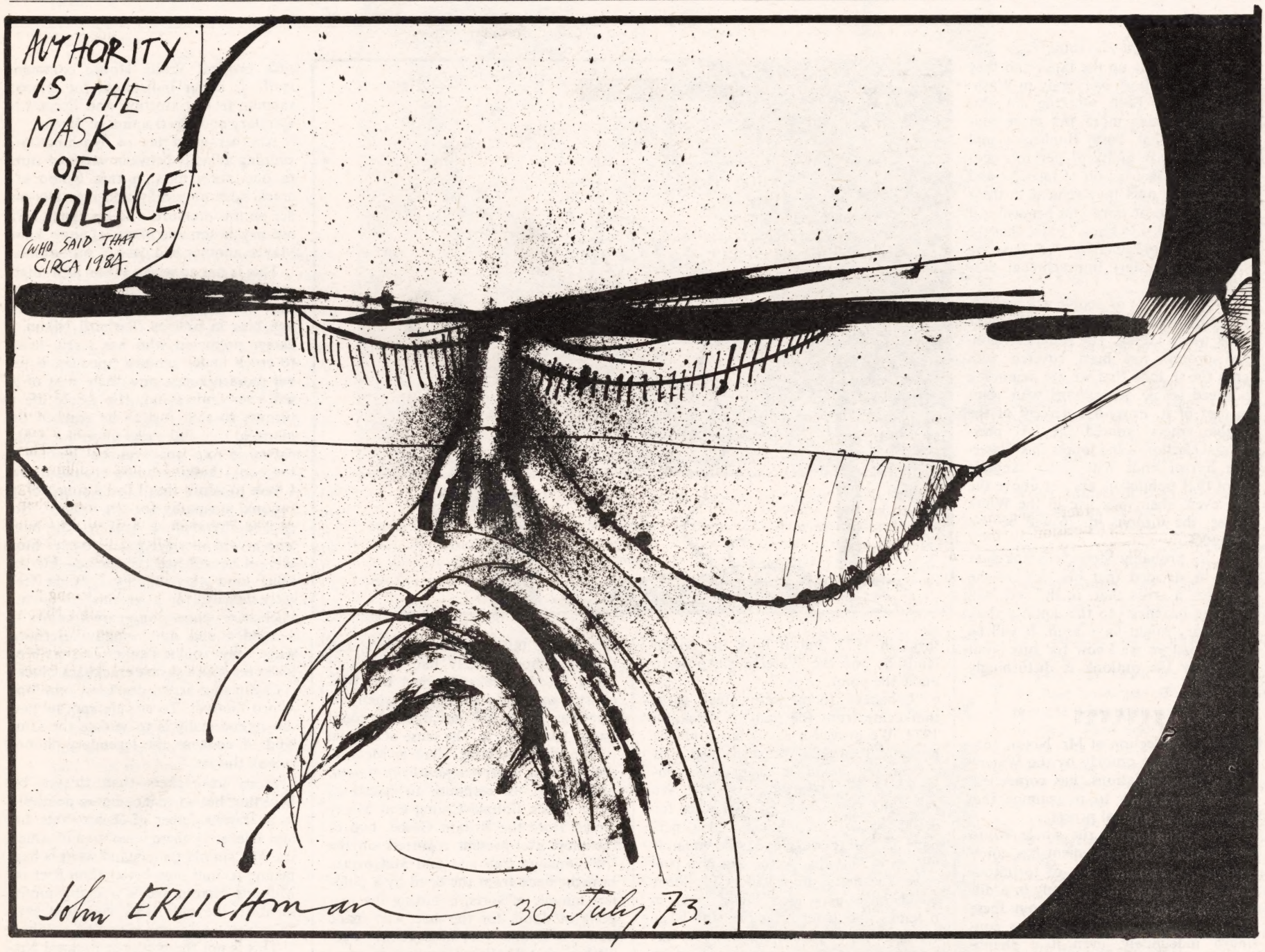
That is one possibility—but if the tapes are *prima facie* incriminating, there is not much chance that any court, committee or grand jury will ever hear them. Anybody who has ever worked with tapes knows how easy it is to alter them, particularly when you're working with voice-activated microphones and a six-second delay/stop mechanism. This means that the tape keeps rolling for six seconds after the last word or long pause in any conversation, and when you play that tape back it will be spotted from start to finish with six-second pauses . . . and six seconds is easily enough time to lay in a five-word phrase like: "But it would be wrong."

This is what Haldeman claims Nixon said *after* telling John Dean that raising a million dollars for the convicted Watergate burglars "would be no problem." And if the tape supports Haldeman's version—even if the prosecution could produce an expert witness to say that the voice-track had been altered—no Grand Jury in America would return an indictment. Expert witnesses are easy to come by, especially on technical questions, and the defense would have no trouble finding its own expert to say that the tape sounded just fine, to him.

A conflict like that would render the tapes useless, as evidence—even by the imprecise standards of a Grand Jury proceeding, and certainly in a courtroom where guilt has to be determined "beyond a reasonable doubt."

Nixon has had the tapes long enough now to have done almost anything he wants with them, and his millionaire friends have access to the best experts and equipment money can buy. Failing that, the ultimate and easiest solution to any "tape problem" is a magnet—which will either erase or distort a whole reel in two or three seconds.

There is not a single investigator for either Cox or the Ervin committee for either Cox of the Ervin committee tapes are really worth hearing. When majority counsel Sam Dash was a law professor at Georgetown University he taught a course that included an unforgettable demonstration of how tape recordings can be altered. Taking three separate tapes that one student described as "three guys babbling aimlessly about things like God, Mother and Apple Butter," Dash had an expert transform them into a single tape of a murder confession.



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So the "constitutional crisis" over the tapes is not so much a matter of what they actually say or don't say, but a question of physical possession and legal jurisdiction. As long as Nixon has the tapes, says Cox, it will be difficult and perhaps impossible for him to prosecute anybody whose name or voice might appear on them, because any defendant whose guilt or innocence may even remotely depend on the contents of the tapes would have grounds to move for dismissal of all charges against him (or her) by accusing the government of "withholding evidence."

Both Haldeman and Ehrlichman, for instance, could base their whole defense against "obstruction of justice" charges on things they either said or didn't say in the Oval Office, within range of Nixon's hidden microphones. They could claim to have said almost anything from "Right on!" to "Fuck you, I quit!" And as long as Nixon refuses to release the tapes, they would probably be immune to prosecution.

(Both Nixon and Ehrlichman, have a different problem, however, with charges connected to the "Ellsberg burglary." That—like the perjury indictments against Mitchell and Stans in the Vesco case—is an entirely separate case. Head "Plumber" Egil Krogh has said that his authorization for the Ellsberg job came "straight out of the Oval Office." Since he allegedly made that statement, Krogh has spent most of his time traveling back and forth across the country taking the Fifth Amendment in various courtrooms—but sooner or later he is going to have to say, under oath, exactly *who* authorized that burglary. Ervin's investigators say they've narrowed it down to two possibilities: Ehrlichman or Nixon, or perhaps both. And this calls up a very strange vision: Ex-President Nixon, babbling hysterically after enduring three months of vicious impeachment proceedings, being led onto a 747 at Dulles airport by two US Marshals vaguely embarrassed at the sound of his jangling handcuffs, to his middle-aisle seat in the tourist compartment for the flight to L.A., to go on trial for burglary—along with Ehrlichman, Krogh, Howard Hunt and six others. How would the other passengers deal with a scene like that? The stewardesses? Would it be a comfortable flight?)

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Probably not—and not very likely, either. As long as Nixon controls the sacred tapes he is not likely to face any tangible charges. Because the handful of people still capable of sinking him with first-hand testimony are entirely dependent—for their freedom—on Nixon's ability to keep those tapes absolutely secure, and subpoenas be damned.

The circle of survivors has narrowed down to three: Haldeman, Ehrlichman and Nixon—and any one of the three could put the other two in prison with a single phone call to Cox or Judge Sirica. Nixon's impeachment would be almost automatic if either Haldeman or Ehrlichman thought they could save themselves by pulling the plug and telling everything they knew about him.

But that is not a likely prospect as long as Nixon has the tapes and Cox keeps insisting that he can't do his job without them. Haldeman and Ehrlichman knew exactly what they were doing when they hired the same attorney. John Wilson took one look at the case and saw that he would in fact be representing Nixon, as well as the other two.

The main question now is Nixon's ability to cling to the tapes—thus protecting the only two men who were close enough to him, day to day, to have enough leverage to take him down with

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them if he yields up the tapes and they reveal what almost everybody in Washington who's been working on this case is becoming more and more convinced of: that both Haldeman and Ehrlichman are guilty of perjury, conspiracy and obstruction of justice—and that Nixon's own involvement in these crimes was so obvious and pervasive, if only on a "need to know" basis, that the House of Representatives will have no choice but to start Impeachment proceedings.

No doubt a lot of people will be badly traumatized by it, but I think that's a risk worth taking. The American political process has been covered with scum for so long that we are beginning to breed whole generations who want no part of it. Forty-five percent of the eligible voters ignored the last presidential election—and unless this Watergate horror ends with some tangible proof that politicians are not above the law, even when they live in the White House, the turnout in '76 will be less than 50%.

So . . . probably McGovern was right when he decided that his loss set the stage for a crisis that, in the end, will be more beneficial to the country than his victory might have been. It will be a while before we know for sure—but right now the outlook is disturbingly healthy.

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The re-election of Mr. Nixon, followed so quickly by the Watergate revelations, has compelled the country to re-examine the reality of our electoral process. . . .

"The unraveling of the whole White House tangle of involvement has come about largely by a series of fortuitous events, many of them unlikely in a different political context. Without these events, the cover-up might have continued indefinitely, even if a Democratic administration vigorously pursued the truth. . . .

"In the wake of Watergate may come more honest and thorough campaign reform than in the aftermath of a successful presidential campaign which stood for such reform. I suspect that after viewing the abuses of the past, voters in the future will insist on full and open debate between the candidates and on frequent, no-holds-barred press conferences for all candidates, and especially the President.

"And I suspect the Congress will respond to the fact that Watergate happened with legislation to assure that Watergate never happens again. Today the prospects for further restrictions on private campaign financing, full disclosure of the personal finances of the candidates, and public finance of all federal campaigns seem to me better than ever—and even better than if a new Democratic administration had urged such steps in early 1973. We did urge them in 1972, but it took the Nixon landslide and the Watergate expose to make the point.

"I believe there were great gains that came from the pain of defeat in 1972. We proved a campaign could be honestly financed. We reaffirmed that a campaign could be open in its conduct and decent in its motivation. We made the Democratic party a place for people as well as politicians. And perhaps in losing we gained the greatest victory of all—that Americans now perceive, far better than a new President could have persuaded them, what is precious about our principles and what we must do to preserve them. The nation now sees itself through the prism of Watergate and the Nixon landslide; at last, perhaps, we see through a glass clearly.

"Because of all this, it is possible that by 1976, the 200th anniversary of America's birth, there will be a true rebirth of patriotism; that we will not only know our ideals but live them; that democracy may once again become a conviction we keep and not just a description we apply to ourselves. And if the McGovern campaign advanced that hope, even in defeat, then, as I said on election night last November, 'Every minute and every hour and every bone-crushing effort . . . was worth the entire sacrifice.' "

—George McGovern
in the Washington Post
August 12th, 1973

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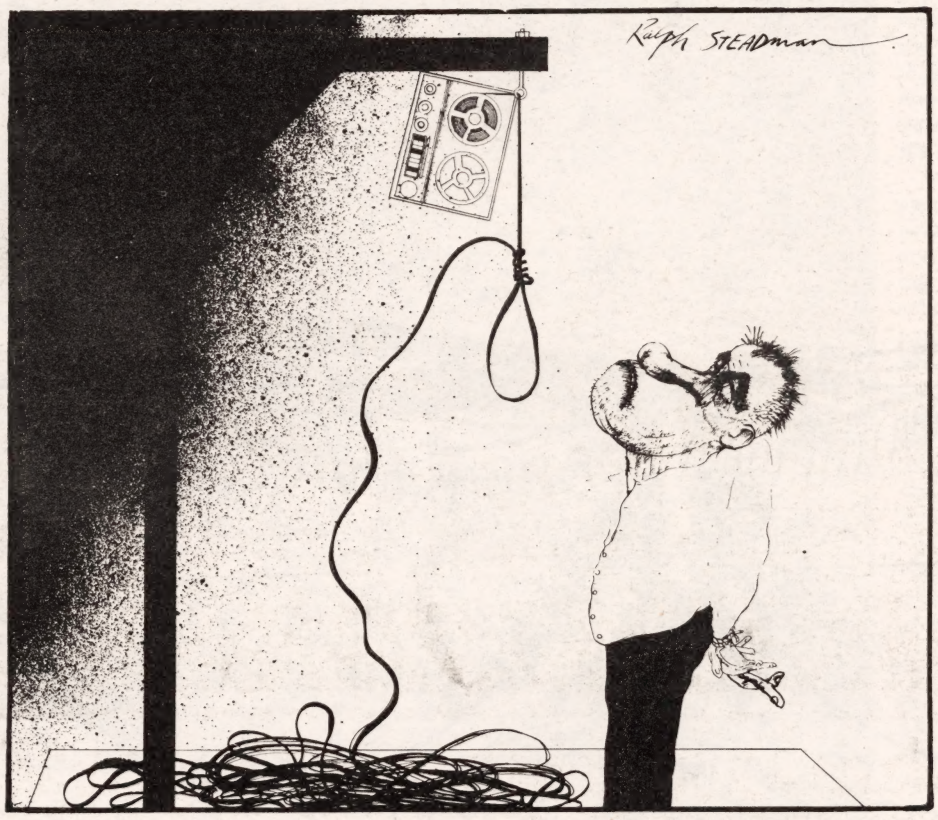

Jesus. . . . Sunday morning in Woody Creek and here's McGovern on the minitube beside my typewriter, looking and talking almost exactly like he was in those speedy weeks between the Wisconsin and Ohio primaries, when his star was rising so fast that he could barely hang onto it. The sense of *deja vu* is almost frightening: Here is McGovern speaking sharply *against the system,* once again, in response to questions from CBS's Connie Chung and Marty Nolan from the Boston Globe, two of the most ever-present reporters on the '72 campaign trail . . . and McGovern, brought back from the dead by a political miracle of sorts, is hitting the first gong of doom for the man who made him a landslide loser nine months ago: "When that [judicial] process is complete and the Supreme Court rules that the President must turn over the tapes—and he refuses to do so—I think the Congress will have no recourse but to seriously consider Impeachment."

Cazart! The fat is approaching the fire—very slowly, and in very cautious hands, but there is no ignoring the general drift of things. Sometime between now and the end of 1973, Richard Nixon may have to bite that bullet he's talked about for so long. Seven is a lucky number for gamblers, but not for fixers, and Nixon's seventh crisis is beginning to put his first six in very deep shade. Even the most conservative betting in Washington, these days, has Nixon either resigning or being impeached by the autumn of '74—if not for reasons directly connected to the "Watergate scandal," then because of his inability to explain how he paid for his beach-mansion at San Clemente, or why Vice President Agnew—along with most of Nixon's original White House command staff—is under indictment for felonies ranging from Extortion and Perjury to Burglary and Obstruction of Justice.

Another good bet in Washington—running at odds between two and three to one, these days, is that Nixon will crack both physically and mentally under all this pressure, and develop a serious psychosomatic illness of some kind: Maybe another bad case of pneumonia.

This is not so wild a vision as it might sound—not even in the context of my own known taste for fantasy and savage bias in politics. Richard Nixon, a career politician who has rarely failed to crack under genuine pressure, is under more pressure now than most of us will ever understand. His whole life is turning to shit, just as he reached the pinnacle . . . and every once in a while, caving in to a weakness that blooms in the cool, thinking hours around dawn, I have to admit that I feel a touch of irrational sympathy for the bastard. Not as The President: a broken little bully who would sacrifice us all to save himself—if he still had the choice—but the same kind of sympathy I might feel, momentarily, for a vicious cheap-shot linebacker whose long career comes to a sudden end one Sunday afternoon when some rookie flanker shatters both his knees with a savage crackback block.

Cheap shot artists don't last very long in pro football. To cripple another person intentionally is to violate the same kind of code as the legendary "honor among thieves."

More linebackers than thieves believe this, but when it comes to politics—to a 28-year career of cheap shots, lies and thievery—there is no man in America who should understand what is happening to him now better than Richard Milhous Nixon. He is a living monument to the old Army rule that says: "The only *real* crime is getting caught."

This is not the first time Richard Nixon has been caught. After his failed campaign for the Governorship of California in 1962 he was formally convicted—along with H.R. Haldeman, Maurice Stans, Murray Chotiner, Herb Klein and Herb Kalmbach for almost exactly the same kind of crudely illegal campaign tactics that he stands accused of today.

But this time, in the language of the sergeants who keep military tradition alive, "he got caught every which way" . . . and "his ass went into the blades."

Not many people have ever written in the English language better than a Polak with a twisted sense of humor who called himself Joseph Conrad. And if he were with us today I think he'd be getting a fine boot out of this Watergate story. Mr. Kurtz, in Conrad's *Heart Of Darkness,* did his thing.

Mr. Nixon also did his thing.

And now, just as surely as Kurtz: "Mistah Nixon, he dead."